

Conference Report Summary

In the conference report pertaining to the imagined communities and mining communities, the same imaginary concepts of Orientalism and over generalization of an isolated culture were examined as applied to the mining communities of England. This examination reveals that much the same way as most broad stroked generalizations pigeon hole the culture of an unfamiliar, homogenous, and misunderstood demographic take place on a large scale; the same “us and them” dichotomy can be similarly executed on a less distant, smaller community as a means of solidifying the nationalistic nature of the dominant culture. The historical place and significance of England’s mining communities has been scattered and inconsistent at best. Several literary examples are given of great treks that cross through these regions and barely warrant a mention of the mining communities. It is almost as if these communities were as different as the culture of what the English would deem the “Far East”. This comparison is made evident by the possible subconscious reference to Arab men by H.V. Morton in his writing that described the sitting style of miners as “Englishmen who squat like Arabs”. In this description no other exotic framework would suffice but to conjure images of the “orient” as a means to paint the miners in the most Non-English manner contemporarily available.

The nationalistic nature of the English identity needed “oppositional characters” in the social identity mechanism to solidify what “being English” entailed. It is often easier to politically polarize a demographic to unify certain aspects of solidarity. Instead of lead by example, it is more of a define by opposite. The English identity was solidly

imbedded in the industrial movement; therefore it was beneficial to the nationalist identity to introduce, proliferate, and embrace such imagery of a culture that was prone to sub-human activity such as filthy, barbaric men emerging from a hole in the ground covered in coal dust and residing in homogenous communities that embraced oppositional politics. The culture of mining communities was slowly demonized, regardless of their contributions to the overall society. If miners struck during wartime they were painted as unpatriotic. In times when capitalism reigned supreme the unionizing practices of collective bargaining was seen as both communist and anti capitalist. All of which aided the cultivation and solidification a national identity and furthered the ambitions of the dominant culture by crafting an “us and them” dichotomy.

Much like the middle east has been plagued with media stories and images of violence, mining communities suffer the same fate. Often so as a result of focus on the violence and public disturbance surrounding strikes and protests. Isolated acts of civil disobedience such as the Tonyandy riots (or even West Virginia’s Matewan Massacre) culminate imagery of a savage subculture that is prone to violent behavior. Despite these setbacks, the writer suggest that emphasis be placed on how a town or community defines itself versus the definitions and stigmas placed upon it my a dominant culture. In many cases the purpose of a union is looked as a hindrance or interference to the business market that is based solely upon greed, instead of viewing the actual nature of its purpose which is to develop an all inclusive community of workers.

As the mining industry grew smaller with time, which is apparently because the fruit of their labor is a finite resource, the legends of filth, violence, greedy unionists, and barbaric citizens remained as a stigma to the trade and the residents (as well as

descendants) of both the region and the trade. The quote from Doreen Massey speaks volumes in reference to both this specific mining scenario and the overt generalizations laid upon the concept of Orientalism; ‘the identity of a place does not derive from some internalized history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with the “outside”’.